The role of Physician Assistants in the Aboriginal Community Control Health Sector
Who are the ACCHS in Queensland
Who are physician assistants?

- Members of the medical profession
- Practice delegated medicine
- Trained as generalist
- Extend the services by a doctor
- Provide primary healthcare
- Patient examination
- Diagnose
- Order treatment
- Formulate management plans
- Review patients
- Assist in surgery
- Perform minor surgical procedures
- Refer to specialists
Background

• Much discussion and debate regarding PAs in Australia
• Queensland Pilot trials
• QAIHC deliberations regarding the role of Physician Assistants (Pas) in the Aboriginal and Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) sector.
• MICRRH/QAIHC Project
Research Aim

• Explore the potential role of Physician Assistants (PA) in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector.

• Analyse the barriers and enablers to Physician Assistant roles in ACCHOs from the perspective of Aboriginal Health Service staff and management – GPs, nurses, AHWs, CEOs, board and management.
Methods

- Approval ACCHS CEOs and Boards
- Ethical approval from James Cook University and QAIHC
- Project period: 2008
- Final Project Report: 2013
- Sample: 2 remote sites, 2 urban sites
- ACCHS Health professional perspectives (semi-structured interviews)
- Management and Board perspectives (semi-structured interviews)
Workforce Support

- Struggle to recruit doctors
- High demand for services
- High staff turnover
- May assist in keeping up with workloads
- May assist in supporting team members
- May assist the doctors in providing primary health care
- May assist in the recruitment of doctors
- Increase revenue through medicare chargeable services
Cultural and Professional Development Issues

• Aboriginal people being supported to gain PA qualifications
• Financial, accommodation, supervision and mentoring support
• Study within local area
• Facilitated student placements through ACCHS, QAIHC and university collaborations
• Physician Assistants from another culture
• Need for cultural training essential
• Immersion in health service, service population and community
Acceptance of PA role in the ACCHS sector

- Boundary lines with other professionals eg. Doctor, Nurse Practitioner, AHW, social workers
- Clear explanations of the function, scope of practice and accountabilities
- ‘Team Ready’ – through multi-disciplinary placement during training
- Strong understanding of other health professional roles
- Strong understanding of integrated care
- Clearly communicated delegated role and function compared to nurse practitioners
- AHW could be usurped by PA role being delegated to lesser tasks in ACCHS
Service Quality

• The role would improve the quality of the service
• The role would improve continuity of care
• The role would improve expansion of services
• New role would challenge existing roles, responsibilities and organisational charts
• Better streamline of services
• Effective response to increase in chronic disease management demands
• Role not a ‘cure-all’ for all service needs
Implications and future outlook

+ Establishment of the PA Association
+ Queensland now has provisions for PAs

- Shut out of the MBS and PBS
- Freezing of JCU enrolments in 2018
- Minimal Employment opportunities in Queensland
QUESTIONS
References